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Infancy of
Our Saviour.

A
Christmas Carol.

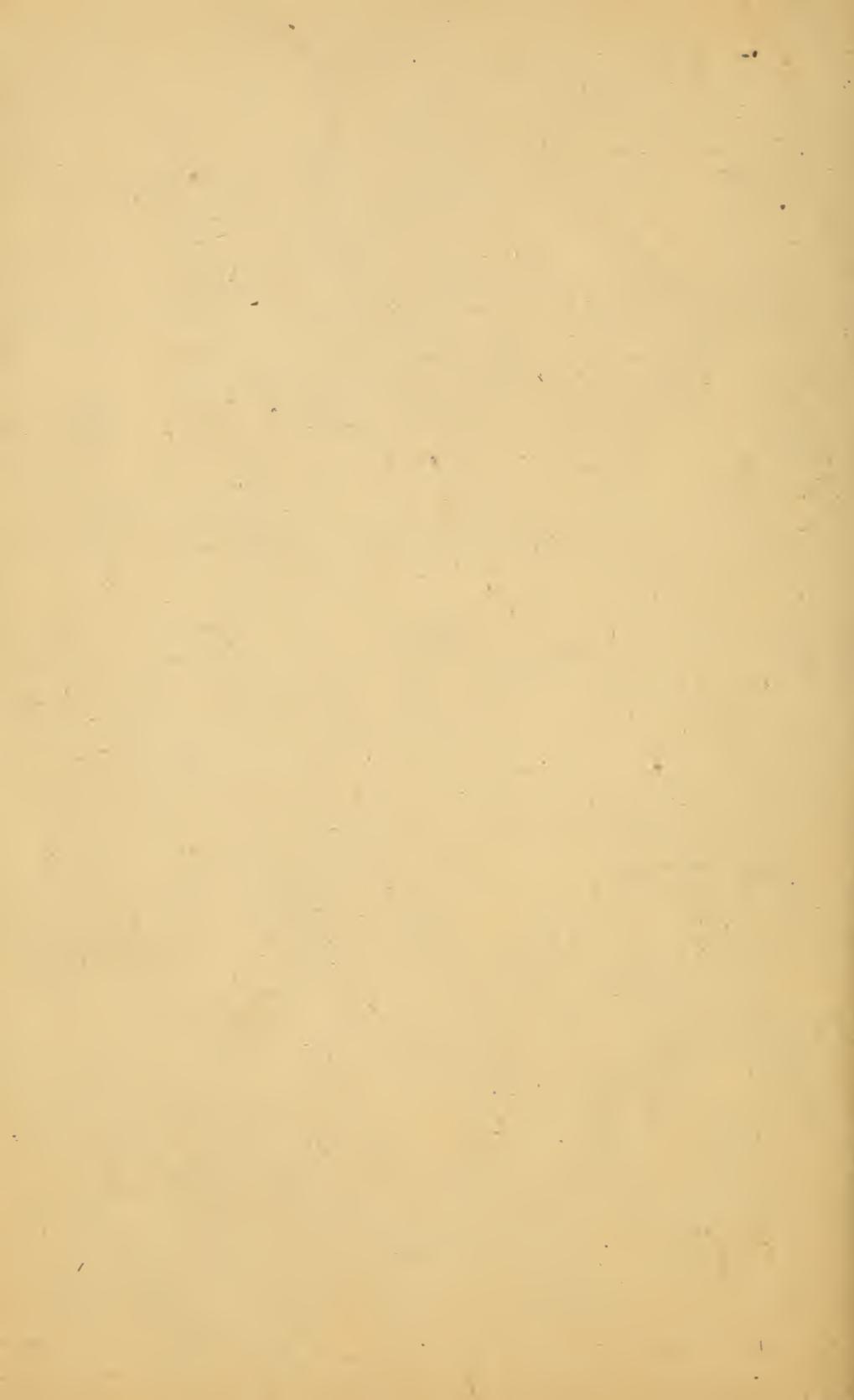
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LEGEND OF THE INFANCY
OF OUR SAVIOUR.

LEGEND
OF THE INFANCY
OF
OUR SAVIOUR.

A Christmas Carol.

BY
JULIET H. L. CAMPBELL.



PHILADELPHIA:
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“Under a palm tree, by the green old Nile,
Lull'd on his mother's breast, the fair child lies,
With dove-like breathings, and a tender smile,
Brooding above the slumber of his eyes.
While, through the stillness of the burning skies,
Lo! the dread works of Egypt's buried kings,
Temple and pyramid, beyond him rise,
Regal and still as everlasting things!
Vain pomps! from Him, with that pure flowery cheek,
Soft shadow'd by his mother's drooping head,
A new-born Spirit, mighty, and yet meek,
O'er the whole world like vernal air shall spread!
And bid all earthly grandeurs cast the crown
Before the suffering and the lowly, down.”

HEMANS.

TO

A Little Girl,

THIS

Little Poem

IS OFFERED, BY HER

MAMMA.

PREFACE.

THE story of the healing of a prince's son by the infant Saviour, during the sojourn in Egypt, is one of the sweetest of those antique, and imaginative, traditions, which formed a portion of the lay literature of the early church.

In elaborating, and adapting this tale to modern taste, I have endeavored to preserve that Oriental aroma, which is the most subtle charm of the Apocryphal legends.

The story which is the basis of this poem, is told in the "*Gospel of the Infancy*,"—a book, rejected as apocryphal by the council of Christian Fathers, but received by the Gnostics, a sect of Christians, in the second century. That the curious reader may see what liberties have been taken with the original, I append an extract from the translation, published in 1697, by Mr. Henry Sike, Professor of Oriental

Languages, Cambridge, and more recently embraced in a collection of apocryphal writings. A note in said collection, informs us that MSS. containing the matter of this gospel are extant in the Welsh language, under the title of *Mabinogi Jesu Grist*.

“17. And there was a girl there, whose body was white with a leprosy, who, being sprinkled with this water, (with which Christ had been washed,) was instantly cleansed from her leprosy.

* * * * *

“19. And when they were making ready to go away, the girl who had been troubled with leprosy, came and desired they would permit her to go along with them. So they consented, and the girl went with them until they came into a great city, in which was the palace of a great king, and whose house was not far from the inn.

“20. Here they stayed, and when the girl went one day to the prince’s wife, and found her in a sorrowful and mournful condition, she asked her the reason of her tears.

“21. She replied, Wonder not at my groans, for I am under a great misfortune, of which I dare not tell any one.

“22. But, says the girl, if you will intrust me with your private grievance, perhaps I may find a remedy for it.

“23. Thou, therefore, says the prince’s wife, shalt keep the secret, and not discover it to any one alive.

“24. I have been married to this prince, who rules as king over large dominions, and lived long with him before he had any child by me.

“25. At length I conceived by him, but, alas! I brought forth a leprous son; which, when he saw, he would not own to be his, but said to me,

“26. Either do thou kill him, or send him to some nurse, in such a place that he may never be heard of. And now take care of yourself, for I will never see you more.

“27. So here I pine, lamenting my wretched and miserable circumstances. Alas my husband! Alas my son! Have I disclosed it unto you?

“28. The girl replied, I have found a remedy for your disease, which I promise you, for I also was leprous, but God hath cleansed me, even He who is called Jesus, the son of the Lady Mary.

* * * * *

“31. But by what means, says she, were you

cleansed from your leprosy? Will you tell me that?

“32. Why not? says the girl: I took water with which his body had been washed, and poured it upon me, and my leprosy vanished.

“33. The prince’s wife then arose, and entertained them: providing a great feast for Joseph among a large company of men.

“34. And the next day took perfumed water to wash the Lord Jesus, and afterward poured the same water upon her son, whom she had brought with her, and her son was instantly cleansed from his leprosy.”

A

LEGEND OF THE INFANCY.

PART FIRST.

The peaceful night is troubled by a cry!—The traveler's Child, whom the little maid husheth, is troubled by a cry.—The little maid feareth dismal enchantments, but hath faith in the superior virtue of the mysterious mother and the wonderful Child, and putteth her trust in their God.—The Infant's garment wardeth off evil, because of her faith.—She findeth the tent of sorrow, and speaketh words of consolation, which the madness of grief rejects.—The little maid beholdeth a child afflicted grievously, and melteth with a tenderness which is mightier than loathing.—But the mother warneth her from contagion.

I.

THE shades reached wide, at eventide,
From sycamore and palm,
And with their dusky arms, enclasped
The land to charméd calm;—
The thirsty land, of sun-smit sand,
Where dropped the dews like balm.

II.

Sweet peace sat in the palaces,
Whose columns kissed the sky;
Sat on the humble hostel shed,
'Mid vine leaves nestling nigh;
And waved her wand, as wide as heaven,
To bless both low and high.
Then why, from out the wilderness,
That piteous plaint and cry?

III.

It shocked the air, when morning fair
Came up the purple east,—
It chid the chime of atabal,
When kings sat down to feast,—
And clamored to the drowsy night,
When toil, and pleasure ceased.

IV.

A murmured moan, of human tone,
From out the desert lair,

As tireless as an angel's voice
In pæan, or in prayer;—
As direful as the dreary wail
Of demon in despair!

* * * * *

V.

“Oh! weary have thy wanderings been!
Light may thy slumbers be!”
Thus, sang a little Arab maid
To the Infant on her knee.
“Rest soft to-night, but ere the light,
Fast through the desert flee,
For thou must be a fugitive
Beyond the ruby sea.”

VI.

Thus, 'neath the hostel's shelter, sang
The nurse, Namouna, mild;
But in its sleep the Infant sobbed,
And then, anon, He smiled,
As He heard the moan, of human tone,
From out the desert wild,

As tireless as an angel's voice
In pæan, or in prayer ;—
And direful as the dreary wail
Of demon in despair.

VII.

“Oh, Mother-maid, with sun-bright brow,
Soothe thou the Child to rest !
From noxious charms, and magic harms,
Clasp to thy sacred breast ;—
The matron love of a virgin heart,
Shall be their alcahest.”

VIII.

“Lo ! I will take the swathing band,
The sinless Infant wore,
And safe, within its mystic folds,
Yon wilderness explore ;
From south to north, now back, now forth,
To find this woe forlore.”

IX.

Thus spake a maid of Araby,
Within the hostel's shade :

Albeit, a maid of Araby,
To Judah's God she prayed,
And forth, toward the desert sped,
Like mercy, undismayed.

X.

The jackal, howling, hied away,
His covert to regain;—
The dragon, impotent to harm,
Withdrew his scaly train;—
And serpents, hissing helpless rage,
Writhed, from her path, in pain:

XI.

Ibis and bittern, startled, fled
Afar, in fear and shame—
While birds of omen cleft the dusk
With wing of meteor flame,
As in her simple panoply,
The faithful maiden came.

XII.

Oh, swathing band of Innocence!
What virtue in thy fold?

To change the heart of maidenhood,
From timid unto bold,
And scare, back to his noisome lair,
The prowler of the wold !

XIII.

Upon the simoon's sulphurous blast,
Still rode that voice of drear ;
And guided by its weary wail,
With zeal, to mercy dear,
Through nocturn shade, fast sped the maid,
Undaunted by a fear.

XIV.

Behold, beside yon lonely tent
A spectral woman stands ;—
Flings to the air her rippling hair,
All white with desert sands,
And spreads abroad, in frantic prayer,
Her supplicating hands.

XV.

“ Daughter of desolation, hail ! ”
Namouna softly said.

“Peace to thy solitary paths,
And by thy bitter bed !
There is a God, who heareth thee,
And lifts thy stricken head.”

XVI.

The mourner heeded not, nor ceased
Her anguish to deplore ;
But shred her tresses to the breeze,—
Her hempen vesture tore,—
And fiercely plucked her wounded breast,
Defiled with dust and gore.

XVII.

“There is no peace!—there is no rest!—
There is no god to heal!—
Dagon is dumb, and Gog is deaf,
Nor yet can Baal feel!—
The Sun and stars, on shining thrones,
Are cold to my appeal !

XVIII.

“And as the gods stare pitiless
From blinded eyes of stone,

So, cruel man, is merciless
To smitten flesh and bone :
Behold my sorrow and my sin,
And then, in haste, begone !”

XIX.

She pointed 'neath the sheltering tent
With gesture fierce and wild :
Where, lo ! upon the naked ground
There sat a little child,—
A little, leprous infant,
That patient sat, and smiled.

XX.

My God ! 'twas piteous to see
That smile on his drear face ;
Whence a loathsome blight, all scaled and
white,
Had quenched the infant grace ;
The hideous blight of leprosy,
No skill could e'er efface.

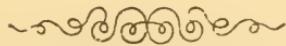
XXI.

Oh, the quick gush of pitying tears,
That to her eyelids start !

The mighty impulses of love,
That thrilled Namouna, swart,
As she clasped the outcast innocent,
Close to her yearning heart.

XXII.

“Unclean! unclean! Avaunt! avaunt!
Nor be thy flesh defiled!”
The shrieking mother fiercely tore
From tender arms, her child,
And on his young, unconscious head,
The desert ashes piled.



PART SECOND.

The little maid is inspired with belief in God, and lays upon the wrath of grief, the charm she hath worn.—The virtue of Christ's garment subdueth the passion, and an impulse of partial belief stirreth the heathen woman. She tests the wisdom and truth of her comforter with obscure words.—The little maid understandeth her sayings; maketh light of them, and answereth with the great mystery of Christianity.—The heathen is seized by that conviction of the truth of things not understood, which is Christian faith, and telleth her story; confesseth her repinings, because she was childless, amid the universal motherhood of nature.—The taunts of a Hebrew captive, having exasperated the queen to cruelty and despair, the God of the captive sendeth her desire; which she hails as a blessing, but anon, recognizes as a punishment.

I.

SWEET comes the lullaby of calms,
Where warring tempests meet,—
All sweetly treads the dewy night,
On noontide's fiery feet,—
And rising from yon vitreous waste,
The palm-plumed isles are sweet!

II.

Than calm, to storm,—than dew, to
drought,—
Than vert, 'mid deserts sere—
More sweet, the lofty chaunt of Hope
To a despairing ear ;—
And sweeter, to the desolate,
The voice of human cheer !

III.

“ Forbear thy dole, unquiet soul !
My God hath seen thy sorrow.
Though heavy be the shrouded night,
Joy dawneth with the morrow ;
Exalt thy heart in hope, and light,
From morning’s promise borrow !”

IV.

’Twas thus the young Namouna spoke,
In tones compassionate ;
As, folding on that anguished breast,
The sacred mithridate,
Of a holy Infant’s swathing band,
She bade its rage abate.

V.

Then woe forgot to wail ; and peace
Subdued the passion keen :
While instantly, as out of heaven,
There fell a calm serene,
As the mother sat beside the maid,
The wondering child between.

VI.

“And if,” she said, “there healing be
In Him thou dost adore ;
Or power, to pluck the fang of grief,
From out my bosom’s core,—
The riddle I rehearse to thee,
With prescient art explore.

VII.

“*The barren beareth bitter fruit
When vintage time is o’er ;
His living sons, a childless king,
In anguish doth deplore :
Accurséd be the answered prayer,
For ever, ever, more !*”

VIII.

She took the babe upon her knee,
 And said, that maiden mild :
 “*This* is thy late and bitter fruit :
 The king’s dishonored child !
 And *this* thy granted prayer—thy curse !”
 The dismal infant smiled,
 Answering, as might a happier wight,
 By honeyed words beguiled.

IX.

While with fresh rage, his mother sought
 To rend her horrent hair ;
 But the spell of rest, upon her breast,
 O’ermastered its despair,
 And folded calm, each quivering palm,
 Athwart her brow in prayer.

X.

“Thy words are naught,” Namouna said :
 “Behold, I show to thee,
 Sayings obscure, yet full of light,
 And precious augury.
 Harken the sacred oracles,
 Of heavenly mystery.”

XI.

*"The purest mother in the land,
Is a maiden undefiled :—
The Power that framed the universe
Dwells in a little child :—
A God is man,—a man is God,—
And wrath is reconciled!"*

XII.

The raver drew her fingers through
Those locks that, unconfined,
Trailed to the dust their sinuous length,
Or writhed along the wind ;
And round her brow, grown placid now,
Their dusky coil entwined.

XIII.

*"Oh, wondrous messenger of ruth !
Throughout my soul doth thrill
The weird wit of thy mystic speech ;
What superhuman skill,
Dispelleth doubt, compelleth faith,
And leads my rebel will ?"*

XIV.

“This head, debased and shelterless,
Hath worn a golden crown ;
And ’neath vermillion canopies,
Hath lain in honor down ;—
This head, on which irreverent suns
Glare, through the sackcloth brown !

XV.

“These tender feet have wearied, in
Triumphal paths of kings ;
And rested on the marble floors,
Whose perfumed fountain springs
In foamy plumes—these wounded feet,
Bleeding with reptile stings !

XVI.

“With stateliest observances
Slaves compassed me about ;
While brazen doors, and porphyry walls,
Shut all dishonor out.
But through the gate, and past the guard,
Came discontent and doubt !

XVII.

“For, childless in the land I moved,
All motherhood among:
The lion-hunted Antelope
Brought forth her hardy young;
About the sacrificial doves,
Their tender nestlings clung;
And to her breast, my captive maid,
Clasped the king’s child, and sung:—

XVIII.

“Now blessed be my father’s God,
In that He blesseth me!
And giveth one, such princely son,
To sit upon my knee,
Cursing the queen with barrenness,—
The queen who hateth thee!
The sparrows, on their teeming nests,
Are worthier than she!”

XIX.

“Fast fled her child unto the wild,
As hunted fox-cubs fly,

When strangled there, in tangled hair,
I bade his mother lie;—
And through the air, in mad despair,
Lifted a bitter cry,
For *any* god, to hear my prayer,
And send it swift reply!

XX.

“And I was answered. In that hour,
A life that was not mine,
Stirred in my breast, and hushed to rest,
The passion, and repine.
My guilty soul grew purged and whole,
And peaceful as a shrine,
When the king loved me for that life,
With love that was not mine.

XXI.

“Oh, bliss too brief! oh, endless grief!
When I had brought the spark
Of precious life, with pain and strife,
Forth from a chaos dark,
And saw the fresh, the new-born flesh,
Scaled with the leprous mark!

XXII.

“ Oh, cruel was the father’s rage,
That would have slain his son !
And pitiless the husband’s eyes,
That bade my sorrow shun,
The solace of their love and light,
And from their sight begone.

XXIII.

“ The barren beareth bitter fruit
When vintage time is o’er ;
His living sons, a childless king,
In sorrow doth deplore ;
Accurséd be the answered prayer
For ever, ever more !”



PART THIRD.

The little maid leadeth the heathen to Christ, teaching the mystery of His salvation.—Encompassed and directed by God's unseen influences, they reach the Saviour! who accepts the bath, typical of His baptism; which, being afterward administered to the unclean, accomplisheth his regeneration, and floweth perpetually, for the healing of nations, while the angels of heaven rejoice evermore.

I.

NAMOUNA took the infant up,
Low, groveling, in the sand :
She laid him on his mother's breast,
She took his mother's hand,
And led her through the wilderness,
Unto the pleasant land.

II.

And as they toiled along the waste,
Or rested on the wold—
Rehearsed, in lingering, or in haste,
That wondrous story, told
By Sybils to the passing time,
By Prophets to the old,—

III.

Of Mary's maiden motherhood,
And of the Holy One,
Who was divine, and human, too :
Her God, and eke, her son ;
Who came with grace, to save a race,
That sinned beneath the sun.

IV.

Then, falling from such lofty theme,
Into a lowlier tale,
Told, *she* had been a leper, too,
And nothing could avail,
Till Godhead, throned in baby eyes,
Rebuked her heavy ail.

V.

Thus passed they to the pleasant land ;
Around their pathway shone
The starry lilies of the field ;
While all the night was strown
With stars, (as lilies pure and pale !)
To light the wanderers on.

VI.

A milky dove flew on before,—
A snowy lamb behind,
Fast followéd—and these they saw :
But saw not, (being blind !)
The feet of angels, on the way—
Their wings upon the wind !

VII.

They passed into the pleasant land ;
And ceased their journey, where
A lady, stately as the palm,
And as the lily, fair—
With paly rays of glory blent
Amid her golden hair—
Sat, thronéd, on an emerald hill,
Illumining the air.
Couched at her feet the crescent moon,
And in her arms a Child,
More glorious than the cherubim,
Serenely sat, and smiled.

VIII.

“Hail, Mother-maid !” Namouna said,
“The guiding stars are high !

And all thy glowing couriers
Wait in the midnight sky.
Ere sultry day looks on the way,
Rise from thy rest, and fly !

IX.

“But first, from yonder spring I’ll bring
The water flowing free,
To lave the baby limbs of Him
Who nestles on thy knee,
That so, refreshed, my Lord shall pass
Beyond the ruby sea.”

X.

She filled a basin at the fount
With water pure and clean :
She dipt the Infant’s radiant form
Low in the crystal sheen :
And through prismatic waves, that dashed
In tiny swell between,
Glimpses of rainbowed glory flashed
In crimson, gold, and green !

XI.

The leper clapped his little hands,
Such wondrous sight to see !
The leper clapped his lothly hands,
And laughed with hideous glee,
As he caught the drops our precious Lord
Plashed to him sportively.

XII.

The leper clapped his little hands,
And wagged his lothly chin,
When Jesus left the wondrous bath,
And he was lifted in,
And cleansed, from flesh, the leprosy,
And washed, from soul, the sin.

XIII.

While, lo ! a healing bounteousness
O'erflowed the vessel's brim,
Past all the nations of the earth,
And down to ages dim ;
As, to the music of far spheres,
Thus sang the seraphim :—

XIV.

“The purest maiden in the earth
Is a mother undefiled !
The Power that framed the universe
Rests in a little child !
A God is man ! a man is God !
And wrath is reconciled !”



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